

**Testimony Supporting
S.B. 26 An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education
Ashlyn Ellsworth
Education Committee
March 3, 2014**

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Ashlyn Ellsworth, President of the Eastford Readiness Council, MSW student from the University of Connecticut, and mother of a former, current, and future preschool student.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S.B. 26, An Act Expanding Opportunities for Early Childhood Education. I am in favor of this legislation and would hope you support it.

Access to affordable, high-quality early education programs with quality educators is a problem. These early opportunities are vital for academic success, not only in elementary school but throughout ones academic career. Children who attend Pre-Kindergarten programs have higher math and reading skills, and increased high school and college graduation rates. Connecticut has made a commendable commitment to early education, but unfortunately many children still do not have access, and current funding is out of date.

Since its inception in 2007, the Eastord Readiness program has seen its expenses increase, yet reimbursement rates have remained still. Over the past 7 years our programs salaries and benefits alone have increased by \$45,000. Our small town nestled way up in the northeastern corner has experienced firsthand that in order to uphold a high-quality early education program, it requires providing competitive wages to attract and retain high-quality early childhood educators. Although we appreciate the proposed one time 3% rate increase, it is not sufficient. We believe that this piece of the legislation should be amended to establish a competitive wage rate that corresponds to the new qualification standards outlined in this legislation. If you are mandating quality educators, and quality programs, we need the adequate funding.

I am also asking that you allow the maximum flexibility to reallocate unused slots to those programs in need. With so many children not being served, there is no reason for even one of these life changing slots to go unfilled.

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee, I urge you to support the expansion of early childhood programs and amend the language to establish a rate that would allow for the retention of high quality educators. Research has shown that early

childhood education is one of the best investments we can make. Invest wisely, support universal pre-kindergarten and increase reimbursement rates.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.